

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2262

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 0415

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, HO

SUBJECT: REGIONAL STUDY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS SUPPLY RESTRAINTS

REF: STATE 015423

1. THE COMMENTS REQUESTED BY REFTEL ARE CONTAINED IN THE
FOLLOWING:

(1) (A) THE FACTORS FAVORING CONVENTIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS
IN HONDURAS ARE IN PART BASED UPON THE COSTS INVOLVED IN
ARMS PURCHASES. HONDURAS IS A POOR COUNTRY WITH MANY DE-
VELOPMENTAL NEEDS; THE FUNDS DEVOTED TO ARMS PURCHASES ARE,
TO A LARGE EXTENT, DIVERTED FROM AREAS OF PRESSING SOCIAL
NEED. THIS FACTOR IS APPARENT TO THE MILITARY ESTABLISH-
MENT AND OTHER IMPORTANT SECTORS OF HONDURAN SOCIETY; HOW-
EVER, THE HONDURAS-EL SALVADOR DISPUTE AND ITS ATTENDANT
ARMS BUILD-UP FORCES THEM TO PRESS FOR INCREASED ARMS
PURCHASES. IN THAT REGARD, A CENTRAL AMERICAN ARMS RE-
STRAINT AGREEMENT WOULD ALLOW HONDURAS TO DEVOTE AN INCREASED
AMOUNT OF MONEY TO INTERNAL CONCERNS; FOR THAT REASON,
PRESSING DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ARE A CONTINUOUS FORCE BEING
EXERTED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO PRACTICE RESTRAINT IN THE
PURCHASE OF ARMS.

(1) (B) THE REASONABLE AVAILABILITY OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS
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THROUGH U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE SOURCES IS BECOMING MORE

AND MORE QUESTIONABLE TO THE HONDURANS. THE INTERNATIONAL ARMS MARKET, TO WHICH HONDURAS IS BEING FORCED TO TURN, POSES MANY PROBLEMS FOR THE UNSOPHISTICATED; YET, SUCH SOURCES ARE THE MAJOR ALTERNATIVES TO THE U.S. THEREFORE, THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN OBTAINING ARMS TEND TO CAUSE THE HONDURANS TO FAVOR REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT.

(2) (A) THE FUNDAMENTAL OBSTACLE, FROM THE HONDURAN VIEW-POINT, TO ARMS RESTRAINT IS ITS CONTINUING DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR. ALL OTHER FACTORS ARE INSIGNIFICANT RELATIVE TO THIS CENTRAL ISSUE. THE 1969 WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH HAVE FORCED THE GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE ITS ARMS PURCHASES TO MAINTAIN AN "EQUILIBRIUM" WITH EL SALVADOR, BECAUSE OF THE FEAR THAT ANOTHER WAR WOULD FIND HONDURAS UNPREPARED TO FACE A NEW SALVADORAN ATTACK. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THIS "ARMS RACE" WILL CONTINUE UNTIL THERE IS A RESOLUTION OF THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

(2) (B) THE THREAT OF GUERRILLA ACTIVITY WITHIN THE NATION'S BORDERS IS NOT OF MAJOR CONCERN AT THIS TIME; HOWEVER, THE POSSIBLE GROWTH OF SUCH A THREAT IS A REALITY AND THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT WILL WISH TO INSURE THAT THEY ARE ADEQUATELY EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH SUCH AN EVENTUALITY.

(2) (C) THE COUNTRY TEAM IS DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER EFFORTS OF SOME THIRD GOVERNMENTS, MOST NOTABLY ISRAEL, TO EXPLOIT THE HONDURAS-EL SALVADOR DISPUTE TO PROMOTE SALES OF ARMS WHICH ARE CLEARLY ESCALATING THE ARMS RACE.

(3) CENTRAL AMERICA WOULD SEEM TO BE AN APPROPRIATE SUB-REGIONAL AREA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARMS RESTRAINT AGREEMENT FOR BOTH POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL REASONS. HOWEVER, THE EXISTENCE OF THE HONDURAS-EL SALVADOR AND GUATEMALA-BELIZE DISPUTES MAKE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH AN AGREEMENT ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE. UNTIL THOSE DISPUTES ARE RESOLVED, THE PROSPECTS OF ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN COUNTRIES IN THIS AREA OR AS A REGIONAL GROUPING ARE DIM. THE POSSIBILITY OF RELATING REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTERESTS, SUCH AS A RESTRUCTURED COMMON MARKET, TO REGIONAL DEFENSE INTERESTS WOULD NOT BE A POSSIBILITY UNTIL THE BILATERAL DISPUTE IS RESOLVED.

(4) A UNILATERAL U.S. LEAD TO BRING ABOUT ARMS RESTRAINT IN CENTRAL AMERICA WOULD PROBABLY BE POORLY RECEIVED AS BEING NOT DISINTERESTED. HOWEVER, AN OAS LEAD SUPPORTED BY THE U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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AND OTHER MEMBER STATES TO DEVELOP A SUB-REGIONAL ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT MIGHT WELL BE RECEIVED WITH FAVOR, GIVEN THE CONSTANTLY ESCALATING COST OF ARMS AND HONDURAS' NEED FOR INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT. THIS PRESUPPOSES THAT THE DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR HAS BEEN RESOLVED AND THAT OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE AREA ARE WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS ARMS RESTRAINT. IT MUST ALSO BE REMEMBERED IN THIS CONNECTION THAT HONDURAS WAS HIGHLY DISILLUSIONED BY U.S. AND OAS ACTION

IN THE 1969 WAR AND THAT ITS VIEW OF AN OAS PROPOSAL FOR ARMS LIMITATION SUPPORTED BY THE U.S. COULD BE ADVERSELY COLORED BY THAT EXPERIENCE. ANY ATTEMPT TO BRING ABOUT ARMS RESTRAINT IN THE ABSENCE OF A HONDURAS-EL SALVADOR AGREEMENT PROBABLY WOULD BE VIEWED WITH SUSPICION AND DISPLEASURE. THE DISPLEASURE WOULD BE HEIGHTENED BY WHAT HONDURAN MILITARY LEADERS ALREADY REGARD AS A DE FACTO IMPOSED ARMS LIMITATION CAUSED BY THE COMPLICATED, FRUSTRATING AND DELAY-RIDDEN U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. (5) THE MOST FEASIBLE SUB-REGIONAL RESTRAINT AGREEMENT FOR HONDURAS WOULD BE IN THE FORM OF AN AGREEMENT TO LIMIT NEW ACQUISITION AND PLACE CEILINGS ON MANPOWER. SUCH RESTRAINTS, OF COURSE, WOULD HAVE TO BE RELATED TO A NEED TO MAINTAIN MINIMUM MANPOWER LEVELS AND ADEQUATE WEAPONRY TO MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY.

2. INDUCEMENTS WHICH MIGHT INFLUENCE HONDURAS TO ACCEPT ARMS RESTRAINT DO NOT INCLUDE EITHER U.S. SECURITY GUARANTEES NOR THE PROMISE OF A LIBERAL SUPPLY OF U.S. ARMS. IN THE CASE OF HONDURAS, THE PRIMARY INDUCEMENT TO ACCEPT ARMS LIMITATION IS THE SAME AS THE PRIMARY PRE-CONDITION FOR SUCH LIMITATION, I.E., RESOLVING THE DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR. SANCHEZ

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